

## **IPBES-7 Highlights: Tuesday, 30 April 2019**

On Tuesday, IPBES-7 delegates met in two working groups. Working Group I met throughout the day and in the evening to continue discussing the summary for policy makers (SPM) of the Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Working Group II met in the afternoon to consider the response to the External Review of IPBES.

Highlights of the day included:

- Extensive discussions in the Working Group on the Global Assessment on the most appropriate language to characterize the rate of species extinction;
- A debate on how to communicate scientific findings about extinction risk with varying degrees of certainty; and
- Convergence among delegates on the response to the External Review of the Platform.

### ***Working Group on the Global Assessment***

Delegates considered a draft SPM divided into two sections on key messages and on background. IPBES Chair Robert Watson explained that key messages should be concise and accessible, whereas the SPM background section should establish the links to the evidence provided in the assessment report.

Delegates began with general comments and requests to be considered throughout the SPM. With regard to the Assessment's key messages, delegates commented on: the need for more concrete language as well as regional messages; the importance of an easily understood, clear target for biodiversity conservation; and the need for an overview of knowledge gaps and research needs. On the concepts used in the Assessment, delegates requested including in the SPM the notions of "ecosystem services" and "cost of inaction." On the content of the SPM, requests included: emphasizing the role of businesses and financial institutions as well as instruments to influence their behavior to achieve the required transformational change; including freshwater ecosystems alongside terrestrial and marine ecosystems; referencing key biodiversity areas when discussing protected areas; and recognizing the status of crop wild relatives.

Participants then delved into discussions of an overarching nature on whether to reference "ecosystem services" and "nature's gifts" as an embodiment of "nature's contributions to people." They further exchanged opinions on whether a reference to the

"sixth mass extinction" should be included, and deliberated upon the Convention on Biological Diversity's definition of biodiversity and how to best express rates of biodiversity decline.

There was debate on how to refer to cash crops that rely on animal pollination and ultimately delegates preferred listing common examples. Several countries debated reference to drugs that were "natural or synthetic products inspired by nature" versus "obtained and derived from nature." Plenary elected to retain the original language rather than substitute "derived from nature" agreeing that this conveyed a different meaning than "inspired by," and would eliminate drugs obtained from certain technologies. Plenary agreed to remove mention to low, middle, and high-income countries, since it is not internationally agreed language.

Delegates further discussed trade-offs in the co-production and use of nature's contributions, noting impacts resulting from giving priority to one contribution over another. They addressed the role of food production and discussed possible synergies, such as agricultural practices that enhance carbon sequestration.

Delegates conversed about whether the quality of forests being lost should be highlighted along with total forest area and whether to emphasize pressures on boreal forests, in addition to the ones in tropical areas. They further discussed: baselines to qualify whether a certain environmental decline could be characterized as "rapid" or "severe"; statistical models regarding indicators and their use; and whether specific areas with different trends than the global average should be included, thus portraying spatial heterogeneity.

In the afternoon, delegates further exchanged views on ways to better convey the sense of urgency regarding biodiversity loss and debated at length: whether to cite specific extinction rates for different groups of species and how to differentiate varying degrees of certainty regarding these rates without confusing policy makers; and whether to cite both percentages of species at risk as well as estimated numbers, or only one of these measures. Delegates also discussed reference to recent data from the Global Wetlands Outlook regarding wetlands, including on wetland restoration; data on streams; whether to focus on a relatively recent time-period to portray anthropogenic pressures to nature, for example the last 50 years, or to go as far back in time as data allows; and whether to portray the extent of land surface and ocean area that have been affected by human activities versus what remains intact.

Additional topics that attracted considerable attention included whether a reference to the exact forest area and tree cover loss should be included as well as the impact of invasive alien species on native biodiversity in areas of high endemism.

The working group addressed the concept of “biotic homogenization” in an effort to avoid jargon and simultaneously highlight that biological communities are increasingly becoming more similar to each other.

On biodiversity of domesticated animals and plants, participants agreed to refer to breeds in addition to local varieties. They further deliberated on: whether using the term “genetic diversity” limits the scope of diversity loss to the genetic level; the best way to portray that a decreasing number of varieties of plants and animals are being utilized; formal protection regarding crop wild relatives and *in situ* conservation; and ways to show that reductions in agricultural and crop wild relative diversity negatively impacts ecosystems by reducing resilience to stressors like climate change, pests, and pathogens.

In the evening, delegates delved into a discussion on rapid biological evolution caused by anthropogenic drivers, especially for short-lived organisms, trying to clarify the notion, including whether it has negative or positive consequences, or both. They further deliberated upon potential management strategies that can be designed to influence evolutionary trajectories as well as whether evolutionary adaptation can mitigate human-caused drivers of biodiversity loss.

Negotiations continued into the night with delegates addressing the drivers of biodiversity loss.

### **Working Group on Review of IPBES**

In the afternoon, Senka Barudanovic, Co-Chair of the Working Group on the Review of the Platform, opened the discussion on the review of the effectiveness of the administrative and scientific functions of the Platform (IPBES/7/5).

Peter Bridgewater, External Review Panel Co-Chair, presented a summary of key messages of the Review, saying it was an exercise aimed at enhancing IPBES’ long term impacts and ensuring it fulfills its mandate as a science-policy interface. He noted the Review was grounded on an online survey, focus groups, a bibliometric study, and a media impact study. He drew attention to: the legal status and perception of IPBES as a UN organization; the overlapping functions of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) and Bureau; the SPM often being too generic for policy makers to apply; the lack of success in reaching local policy makers, citizens, the private sector, and practitioners; and defining pathways for IPBES to influence policy more systematically and strategically.

Co-Chair Barudanovic proposed, and delegates agreed, to consider draft decision IPBES/7/1/Add.2 as well as four elements from the Chair’s Note mandating specific follow-up activities.

On requesting the MEP and the Bureau to develop a draft vision, mission, and strategy for consideration by the IPBES-8, many delegates said that these should be developed based on the agreed functions, operating principles, and institutional arrangements of the Platform. Bridgewater emphasized that developing a communicable IPBES vision, mission, and strategy was an important recommendation from the Review Panel. He clarified that “visions, missions, and strategies are typical tools

used in the corporate world,” and that developing such would help communicating the Platform’s work to stakeholders outside the IPBES community and ultimately enhance the uptake of IPBES work. Highlighting that plenary should refrain from engaging in lengthy discussions on communication material, agreement began to emerge on requesting the MEP and Bureau to prepare a draft “vision and mission statement.” However, delegates ultimately did not agree, noting that this exceeded their mandates.

Discussions then reverted to considering the elements contained in the draft decision. Much of the discussion focused on a perceived mismatch between the mandates of the MEP, Bureau, and Secretariat, and the proposed requests addressed to them. Delegates underscored the importance of clarifying the bodies’ mandates in the lead up to the second work programme. It was emphasized that IPBES is member state driven, yet that it should foster an adaptive management approach.

Delegates also highlighted: the need for mid-term and final reviews of the work programme up to 2030, taking into account lessons learned from the current review process; how recommendations from the Review will be addressed as part of the work programme; and streamlining IPBES’ governance architecture.

Delegates eventually converged on an approach for taking the recommendations made by the Review Panel into account, in implementing the work programme, including by identifying solutions for consideration by IPBES.

The Secretariat will prepare a revised draft decision on this agenda item for consideration by plenary.

### **In the Corridors**

“It’s a long and winding road from evidence to policy-relevant findings!” one delegate noted as she was searching for her colleagues to continue informal discussions on the best way to characterize the global rate of biodiversity loss in the summary for policy makers (SPM). Should the report make comparisons to historical rates? Will policy makers be confused if a finding mentions both percentages and absolute numbers of species? And how should the SPM explain that findings on some groups of species are less certain but nonetheless alarming? One thing many agreed on is that messages should be short and concise. Delegates labored throughout the day to reduce the length of the paragraphs, only to see them grow again as others put forward suggestions intended to clarify and substantiate statements.

Another question was whether the SPM should contain forward-looking statements that explain the likely future biodiversity loss should no action be taken to address its drivers. A good example of how such a projection can be worded was Chair Watson’s repeated warning that “given the current speed of discussions, we will not even complete the consideration of the key messages, let alone the figures or background information.” Despite the request of some members for him to “stop rushing,” Watson continued urging delegates to stay on track with the tight negotiation schedule. Hurrying to make the most of the short break before the Working Group rejoins for an evening session, a seasoned participant lauded Watson’s persistence, asking “How are we supposed to communicate the urgency of biodiversity loss, if we can’t embrace urgency in the way we negotiate?”